

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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S E C R E T TUNIS 0061

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - P A R A 3

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, TS MO
SUBJECT: MASMOUDI VOICES HIS CONCERN ABOUT PRESIDENT
BOURGUIBA'S VIEW THAT MASMOUDI PERSONA NON
GRATA IN WASHINGTON

REF: TUNIS 41 AND TUNIS 53

1. SUMMARY: DURING ONE AND ONE HALF HOUR MEETING WITH
FONMIN MASMOUDI JAN 4 AT HIS HOME HE BROUGHT UP FACT
THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HAS BEEN TELLING HIM AND OTHERS
THAT MASMOUDI IS PERSONA NON GRATA IN WASHINGTON; THUS
HE CANNOT GO WITH HIM ON VISIT TO U.S. I REITERATED
WHAT I HAD TOLD MASMOUDI'S CHIEF OF CABINET EARLIER
SAME DAY (REPORTED REFTL) TO EFFECT THAT THIS IS NON-
SENSE. MASMOUDI SEEMED TO ACCEPT THIS. HE SAID
NORMALLY HE WOULD HAVE PAID NO HEED TO REPORT BUT IN
PRESIDENT'S CURRENT STATE OF MIND (TUNIS 53) HE AFRAID
PRESIDENT TAKES IT SERIOUSLY-- AND IS OFFERING IT AS
REASON MASMOUDI CANNOT GO WITH HIM TO U.S. I OFFERED
TO TAKE THIS UP WITH BOURGUIBA AT MY NEXT MEETING BUT
MASMOUDI SAID HE DOUBTED THIS WOULD MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE
IN BOURGUIBA'S ATTITUDE. IF MASMOUDI STORY IS ACCURATE
AND IT APPEARS TO BE, BOURGUIBA APPARENTLY MAY WELL
HAVE FINALLY DECIDED TO REMOVE MASMOUDI BEFORE HIS U.S.
TRIP. HE MAY EITHER BELIEVE MASMOUDI AS FON MIN IS
SECRET

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LIABILITY ON THIS TRIP OR THAT THIS OFFERS HIM EXCUSE
HE HAS BEEN LOOKING FOR TO REPLACE MASMOUDI. WE
BELIEVE IN EITHER CASE THAT MASMOUDI'S REMOVAL AT THIS
JUNCTURE MAY NOT BE A WISE MOVE, AS I SUGGESTED IN REF-

TEL. END SUMMARY.

2. MASMOUDI IN COMMENTING ON DECLINE IN STATE OF HEALTH OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA AND CONSEQUENCES THIS MIGHT HAVE FOR TUNISIA'S RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES (REPORTED TUNIS 53) BROUGHT UP REPORT WHICH HE SAID PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HAS RECEIVED FROM AMBASSADOR EL GOULLI AND HABIB BOURGUIBA JR. THAT MASMOUDI IS PERSONA NON GRATA AT THE WHITE HOUSE AND COULD NOT ACCOMPANY BOURGUIBA TO U.S.

3. I RESTATED POINTS I HAD MADE TO HIS CHIEF OF CABINET EARLIER IN DAY AS REPORTED REFTEL. MASMOUDI ACCEPTED THESE AND SAID HE IN NO WAY EXPECTED THAT REPORT WAS TRUE SINCE U.S. DOES NOT CONDUCT ITS FOREIGN RELATIONS IN THIS MANNER. MASMOUDI SAID BOURGUIBA NEVERTHELESS HAS BEEN TELLING PEOPLE, INCLUDING HIM, THAT HE CAN'T TAKE MASMOUDI TO U.S. FOR THIS REASON. HE, MASMOUDI, WILL NORMALLY PAY NO HEED TO SUCH A REPORT BUT IN PRESIDENT'S CURENT STATE OF MIND HE AFRAID PRESIDENT TAKES IT SERIOUSLY.

4. I EXPRESSED SURPRISE THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA ACTUALLY WAS LENDING CREDENCE TO SUCH A NONSENSICAL REPORT AND OFFERED TO DISCUSS THE MATTER WITH HIM THE NEXT TIME WE MEET. MASMOUDI INDICATED HE DOUBTED THIS WOULD SERVE ANY PURPOSE SINCE BOURGUIBA HAS MADE UP HIS MIND ON THIS MATTER.

5. MASMOUDI SAID HE IS AWARE BOURGUIBA WOULD LIKE BOURGUIBA JR. TO BECOME MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND HE DOES NOT HAVE AN UNLIMITED TENURE ON THIS JOB. NEVERTHELESS, HE RESENTED THE ANTI-AMERICAN LABEL THAT WAS BEING PUT ON HIM WHICH HE FEELS IS UNDESERVED. HE KNOWS OF ONLY ONE ACTION WHICH HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR WHICH WAS DISPLEASING TO THE U.S. AND THAT WAS THE VOTE ON CHINA'S ADMISSION TO THE UN WHICH OCCURRED IN SECRET

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VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES. IN RETROSPECT HE FEELS TUNISIA WAS CARRYING OUT A POLICY THAT SECRETARY KISSINGER WAS ADVOCATING AT THE TIME AND STILL IS VIS-A-VIS CHINA.

6. MASMOUDI DID NOT INDICATE IF HE THINKS BOURGUIBA REALLY BELIEVES THIS REPORT OR IF HE IS USING IT AS AN EXCUSE TO BRING BOURGUIBA JR. BACK INTO HIS OLD JOB. HE SAID AT THE TIME OF THE APPOINTMENT OF ABEELAZIZ HAMZAOU I THERE WAS SPECULATION AND RUMORS THAT HAMZAOU I HAD BEEN SELECTED BECAUSE HE WAS AMERICAN TRAINED, HAD AN AMERICAN WIFE AND WAS A FRIEND OF SECRETARY KISSINGER AND HIS ADVISORS. I SAID WE UNDERSTOOD HAMZAOU I HAD

NEVER MET KISSINGER UNTIL HIS VISIT HERE AND THERE WAS NO REASON TO THINK HAMZAOU I WAS MORE ACCEPTABLE TO US THAN HE, MASMOUDI, WOULD BE. MASMOUDI SAID HE RECOGNIZED HAMZAOU I IS A GOOD ADMINISTRATOR AND IT WAS GOOD TO HAVE SOMEONE TO RUN THE MINISTRY WHILE HE IS TRAVELING.

7. COMMENT: MASMOUDI OBVIOUSLY FEELS HIS DAYS AS FON MIN ARE NUMBERED AND THAT HIS BEING LABELED AS PERSONA NON GRATA IN WASHINGTON IS A KEY FACTOR IN PREPARING FOR HIS POSSIBLE REMOVAL. HE GAVE NO INDICATION THAT HE BELIEVES THE REPORT HIMSELF. HE MAY THINK IT IS ONLY A CONVENIENT WAY FOR BOURGUIBA TO JUSTIFY HIS REPLACEMENT BY BOURGUIBA JR. WHO IS WIDELY KNOWN TO BE VERY PRO-AMERICAN. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER BOURGUIBA BELIEVES THIS REPORT OR WHETHER HE IS USING IT AS A RATIONALIZATION FOR AN ACTION HE WAS ELECTED TO TAKE, MASMOUDI'S REMOVAL AT THIS JUNCTURE MAY NOT BE A WISE MOVE AS I SUGGESTED IN TUNIS 41.

SEELYE

SECRET

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